NAKED BISHOP

BEING SERIOUS ABOUT WHAT AIN'T RIGHT IN THE CHURCH



HAS THE CHURCH SOLD OUT TO THE WORLD?

By Steve Maltz

[redacted]

NAKED BISHOP

BEING SERIOUS ABOUT WHAT AIN'T RIGHT IN THE CHURCH



HAS THE CHURCH SOLD OUT TO THE WORLD?

By Steve Maltz

[redacted]

NAKED BISHOP

BEING SERIOUS ABOUT WHAT AIN'T RIGHT IN THE CHURCH



HAS THE CHURCH SOLD OUT TO THE WORLD?

By Steve Maltz

Contents

First words

Chapter One: Cinderella Church

Chapter Two: Anything goes …

Chapter Three: Onwards Christian shirkers …

Chapter Four: His pain, my blame.

Chapter Five: Why apologise?

Last words

First words

Something ain't right in the Church and, to be honest, it's nothing to do with naked bishops, fruity vicars, or even naughty priests. It's the whole thing that's gone astray and it hasn't *just* happened, it's been happening for many many hundreds of years, right back to Bible times. The apostle Paul saw it coming.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

Why did he say this? Well, because it was already happening in *his* day. Christians were starting to become captive to things that came from the mind of man, rather than the Mind of God. And it was no joke, because these *hollow and deceptive philosophies*, mainly from the minds of ancient Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, were introduced into the Church from the 1st Century onwards, even way before the ink had dried on the first available Bibles.

So what? How does that affect me? Surely the Church has had two thousand years to sort things out?

It *does* affect you for the simple reason that, rather than sorting things out, the Church has absorbed so many teachings from *outside* the Bible that what we have now is quite different to that experienced by the very first Christians, at the time of the Book of Acts.

What I am *not* saying is that the Church has got it so wrong that none of us are saved! Our God would never have allowed that and we are secure in our salvation, as long as we are following what the Bible tells us.

What I *am* saying, though, is that we are not experiencing the very best that there is in our Christian life and, in fact, that there is a lot there that is *questionable*, to say the least.

Who are you to lecture me on this? If there was something wrong, surely our pastors, leaders, ministers etc. would have told us?

To be honest, your pastors, leaders and ministers are just flesh and blood like you and me and there was a time when they had to listen to *their* pastors, leaders and ministers, who, in turn, did the same ... all the way down the line. The point is that it is the *system* that we need to question, *not individuals* within the system.

And who am I to judge? Well, nobody really, but, despite all my faults and weaknesses, I have written twelve books, including a trilogy on this subject, and some of these books are changing hearts and minds of pastors, leaders and ministers – and ordinary folk too - all over the world.

What you are now going to read are five essays, adapted from material in my forthcoming book (more of that later). All that I ask is that you engage heart, mind and soul as you start reading and take time to ask what God may be telling you as you read.

So, let's get started ...

Chapter One: Cinderella Church

Richard the Third may have had *the 'ump*, but King Henry the Eighth was positively livid! How could his divine mandate be passed to the next generation if there was no male heir? Thus commenced the familiar sequence regarding the fate of his wives; divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived. Out of this mess came Edward VI, who only lasted a few years, followed by his half-sisters Mary and Elizabeth I.

Henry was a firm believer in the doctrine of the divine right of Kings, seeing himself more or less as the "English Pope", God's right-hand man in *God's own country*, setting himself up as the head of the English Church, once he had split from Rome.

The *divine right of Kings* may have been a convenient excuse for Kings behaving badly, but it was neither *divine* in origin, nor *right*. So where did it come from? It seems to have originated with a Papal Bull, a controversial and badly-received proclamation from Pope Boniface VIII in 1302. The thinking was that God had given spiritual power to the Church (through the Pope, of course) and earthly power to the political ruler, the King. The implication was that the King was free to do whatever he wanted (as was the Pope) and relegated God to absentee parent, leaving his favourite child free to bully the rest of the kids in the playground.

Of course, this was not from the Bible, just an example of the corruption of the medieval

Church and the basic human inclination to create power bases. If this was not something that came from Holy Scripture, then what does the Bible really tell us about such things? Is there such a process of anointing a succession of men (and women) for His purposes? Well there is, but it's not how the World (and the medieval Church) would have done it. Which is, let's face it ... quite comforting.

It all began with Father Abraham, the true head of mankind's earthly (through the Jews) and spiritual (through the Christians) dynasty. He was even commissioned directly from God, with a promise:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:1-3)

So did Abraham (then known as Abram) divorce or behead his wife because of the lack of an heir? Did he leave her for a younger more fertile option when her biological clock had seemingly ground to a halt? Of course not ... no, wait a minute ... he did! Yes, he *did* dally with the au-pair ... but that was at his wife's insistence and she didn't lose her head in the process! The result of this dalliance was a first son, Ishmael.

That would have sufficed for King Henry. A male heir, happy days! But from this point the Bible doesn't follow the World's script, because Ishmael, the first born, does *not* become the heir. Instead Abraham and Sarah break all gynaecological records and produce a son, Isaac, in their twilight years. And it is he who becomes the heir.

... it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned ... (Genesis 21:12)

We move to the next generation. Isaac finds a wife Rebekah and she bears him twins, Esau and Jacob. Again, it is Jacob, the younger, who becomes the heir, albeit as the result of a bit of trickery and fine dining. God repeats the same blessing He gave to his granddad.

"I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. (Genesis 28:13-14)

The next generation is even more interesting because this time the heir is the fourth born, Judah. This is because the firstborn, Reuben, slept with his father's mistress (presumably without permission) and the next two, Simeon and Levi had killed all the males in a city in revenge for the rape of their sister. Further down the line, we find Jesse's six eldest sons being rejected and God's favour

passing to David, who was, of course to become King of Israel.

We all know that the next king of Israel was Solomon, but here we see not one but two curiosities. First, the physical succession. As a King you would expect Solomon to have been David's heir apparent, his first-born. In fact he was at least the tenth official son, not including a collection of *unofficial* sons, born from his mistresses. There's no time to go into this except to say that it was a decision David made himself, prompted by Solomon's mother Bathsheba and Nathan the prophet (1 Kings 1:5-53). Then, there was the spiritual succession, which passes not to Solomon, but his younger brother, Nathan. This was because Solomon had started well, but his reign nosedived at a pace that reflected the speed with which his harem grew!

It is this spiritual succession, from Abraham onwards, that we have been concerning ourselves with. When we talk about heirs in a Biblical sense, we are speaking of a *spiritual* bloodline, rather than a physical one. These people are blood related, but the pattern is not a worldly one; it is not about a position of worldly privilege, of riches and power. It's a very different bloodline. It's a bloodline with an ultimate purpose, the birth of the Messiah, *Jesus Christ*. This bloodline is listed in Luke 3:23-38. Here's some of it:

Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son,

so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham (Luke 3:23-34)

Now the "divine right of kings" produced a succession of self-proclaimed "God's ambassadors", who clearly weren't anything of the sort and used their position to get up to all sorts of naughtiness. It is clear that the Bible teaches otherwise. God gives us a meandering Messianic bloodline and it's not just full of first-borns. Many, such as Esau, Reuben, Simeon and Levi are overlooked on purpose, as are *every* king of Judah and Israel except King David. God operates by very differ-

ent rules, which basically means that ... so should we.

God tends to overlook the big shots.

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. (1 Corinthians 1:27)

He used the stammering, reluctant Moses ("O Lord please send someone else to do it" Exodus 4:13), rather than his more naturally eloquent elder brother, Aaron. Rahab was a common prostitute living in Jericho, yet God used her to save Joshua and the spies and gives her an honourable mention in the "hall of faith" in Hebrews 11:31. Gideon was the lowest member of the lowest clan of Israel and a whinger who needed a series of clear signs before he could be coaxed into action. But then he allowed the Lord to reduce his men by over 99% before delivering a great victory against the Midianites. David was just a shepherd and part time harpist, but this complex, flawed man was moulded by God into a renowned soldier-King and an eternal divine favourite.

Jesus' disciples would all fail auditions as leading men, in any Hollywood drama, except perhaps Judas, who fit the role of deluded baddie quite well. The rest of them, if you remember, scattered like ripples in a puddle at the first whiff of personal danger, when Jesus was arrested (Matthew 26:56). Could you see Bruce, Arnie, Sly or

Van Damme doing the same? Of course they would, they're only actors, after all!

All of these Bible characters go on a personal journey of discovery. God already knows them better than they know themselves and He moulds them each into someone He could use. They don't start that way, some are reluctant (Moses), hesitant (Gideon), wilful (Simon Peter) or just seemingly *not of the right stuff*, but God knows otherwise.

And so it continued in history too. It has to be that way because we must remind ourselves what the goal of every Christian ought to be:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

We need to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus, in order to reflect the Lord's glory. So, it stands to reason that those Christians who have been the most open to this divine transformation should be the ones that God has used the most. That should be the mark of a Christian. So we comb our Church history books and read the testimonies of those great men and women of faith, who sought to emulate Jesus, rather than the World.

Francis of Assisi may have been high-born, but he gained his following from preaching on the streets with the beggars and living the simple life. Similarly, Mother Theresa of

Calcutta (or Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu to her friends) left home at eighteen to be a missionary and dedicated the rest of her life to working among the poorest among the poor. William Wilberforce may have worked in the murky world of politics, but his faith in Jesus shone in his work to abolish slavery, despite failing health and robust opposition. Corrie Ten Boom, the middle aged Dutch Christian, put her own life in constant danger by rescuing many Jews during Nazi occupation, earning her a spell in a concentration camp.

There are, of course, many other examples, most unrecorded and unknown to us this side of heaven. Yet we have to say that they all worked on the margins of Christian society, the exceptions rather than the rule. Francis of Assisi founded his religious order with the blessing of Pope Innocent III, the same man who insisted that all Jews wear the yellow badge, as an example of "a people rejected by God". While Mother Theresa ministered to the poor in Calcutta, just down the road the well-heeled Anglicans of the Raj enjoyed sumptuous meals after their weekly Church services. William Wilberforce may have belonged to a parliament that required a Christian oath for membership, but his fight for the abolition of slavery was largely opposed by the Christian establishment, including the Royal family and Lord Nelson! Corrie Ten Boom was one of just a handful of *righteous gentiles* in the Dutch Church, who stood by the Jews in their hour of need.

Any reading of the history of Christianity in the Western World would tell a similar story; those who stood up for true Biblical faith and the actions inspired by it, were vilified, mocked, persecuted, even martyred, including John Wycliffe, who had the cheek to produce an English translation of the Bible, the first that could be read by the common person!

This all beggars belief and the depths to which the State Church had fallen since those heady exciting days described in the Book of Acts must make God weep. This whole sorry story is told in many of my other books, notably *How the Church Lost the Truth*, which describes the role played by pagan Greek philosophy in this decline.

But God has always supplied a remnant of true believers, either as localised movements (as in the case of the Waldenses and the Moravians), or with faith-filled individuals, such as those already described, who lived extraordinary lives despite the hostility that surrounded them from the "official" Church.

And what of today? Does the Church still persecute *its own*? Where can we see Jesus' likeness? What is the *real* state of the Church today? Are we truly the spotless bride we are meant to be, when Jesus returns for us?

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain

or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Cynical old me, as I ponder, *thank goodness he didn't return during the Dark Ages, or during the Crusades, the Inquisition, or the Holocaust.* What on earth would he have found then, masquerading as the Church? Would he have been like Prince Charming, roaming the earth, ignoring whole bands of ugly sisters, looking for *Cinderella Church*, to that which the slipper fits?

Is it still Cinderella Church that Jesus searches for? That without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, that which is holy and blameless. Or are the stubborn stains of Greece too hard to remove? Is it too late to iron out those ancient wrinkles of pagan philosophy? Where is the Church without blemish?

Well, it may surprise you to know that God's view of Church is not necessarily *our* view. The actual Greek word that is translated as "church" in the New Testament is *ekklesia* and it actually means "called out ones". The *Church* is actually you and me, *not* the building in which we meet. This idea of "church-as-building" originated in the 4th Century when Christianity became the State Religion of the Roman Empire and the emperor needed a way to control the people.

So they constructed these buildings, based on a proven model used for civic assemblies, called them "churches" and proclaimed that *you can only be saved inside these buildings,*

you had to regularly attend meetings inside these buildings if you wanted to be a Christian. It was all about control and the common person knew no better as they couldn't read, no-one had a Bible and, even if they could read, the Scriptures weren't in a language that anyone could understand anyway (they were in Latin, the language of the clergy)!

Today it is different in that we can read our Bibles, yet many of us don't realise that "being Church" is nothing to do with what we do inside those buildings any more, whether they are of the ancient crumbling variety, or sports halls, or people's homes. *We are the Church*. Remember this, it is important.

Let me repeat what I said earlier, when we looked at those characters who lived through Bible times. *God tends to overlook the big shots.*

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. (1 Corinthians 1:27)

I believe that God is preparing an army of Cinderellas, not the dread army of champions led by "God's Generals", or Joel's triumphant army of righteous locusts (as some believe themselves to be), but the scattered remnant of broken, redeemed and selfless people that God is able to use for His purposes because they haven't requisitioned Him for *their* purposes. There is only room for one Kingdom in the economy of God.

For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (Matthew 23:12)

If you conduct a straw poll in the streets to find who are considered the most visible Christians in our society, you would draw a blank and will be fobbed off with the Archbishops and Bishops of the land, none of whom they could personally name. A generation or two ago there were richer pickings with the likes of C.S. Lewis and Malcolm Muggeridge, but *today* ... who knows? What does this tell us? It tells us that we are certainly not living in a *Christian* society, however you may define it. People can reel off names of scientists, politicians, actors, writers ... even celebrity cooks. But Christians? No idea.

If you conducted the same poll with Christians you would probably be furnished with a list of popular writers, speakers, worship leaders and songwriters. There is a theme here, have you noticed it? Christians who are prominent these days in our *Christian subculture* are those who have become well-known for what they *say* ... not necessarily what they *do*. It's all about words, ideas, thoughts, theology, doctrine ... even political opinions, social commentary, theological debate.

It's all just .... so Greek! You will find out why, a little later on.

There's nothing wrong with words and ideas, but where are the Christians who are visibly *doing the stuff*? The reason why non-Christians are not able to name any of us

is because mostly what we are known for these days is for what we *say* (usually moaning about something, or being negative), not what we *do*. And the World has enough opinionated people talking for a living, we are bombarded daily with this stuff.

Yet we are called to be different, to be salt and light, to have our lamps shining brightly, to *demonstrate Jesus to an unbelieving World*, not just talk *about* Him. We need not so much to "talk the talk" as to "walk the walk".

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ***that you may walk worthy of the Lord****, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;* (Colossians 1:9-10 NKJV)

This is not a random quote to support my position, this is the very lifeblood and theme of God's purpose for us. Of course we know this already and there are many of us who are *walking the walk*. This is not about you, it's about all of us because we are all God's representatives. We are here to *demonstrate* His Glory to Joe Bloggs in the street, not explain the exegesis of the doctrine of grace to him. We must make it clear not just that we are performing great acts of charity and service, but what our motivation is.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving

thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

A lot of fuss has been made about the new Pope, Francis. That he stayed in a hotel suite, rather than the opulence of the papal apartment and paid the bill personally when he checked-out. That he rode on a bus after his election (though probably not the 128 from Romford). That he used to cook his own meals and regularly visited slums. The word bandied about here is *humility* and the newsworthiness of this is because of the surprise that "God's representative on Earth" should be *such a humble man*. That's because Popes and churchmen (whatever their denomination) are not really known for *expressing Jesus' likeness*, rather than ruling Jesus' kingdom on earth. It's a refreshing change, I suppose.

We look at the mainstream Church today and look at Paul's observation of *the radiant church without stain and wrinkle* and wonder what kind of fit we have. Is the Church the church, or does it *contain* the church? Well, remember what we discovered earlier. The Church is you and me, the *called-out ones*. There is a precedent for this in Scripture, in Jesus's warnings to the Laodicean Church, in Revelation 3:20:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

So here sit those Laodiceans in the church pews and Jesus invites those who want to listen to him, to open the door to him. The impression is that not everyone is going to want to do this, because *not everyone* in the church (building) is actually the Church!

The Cinderella Church is not a denomination, or an organised Church. It comprises individual, *called-out ones*, who are striving to *walk worthy of the Lord* and who will open the door to Jesus and dine with him because they hunger for him and him alone. It will contain Anglicans but *not* the Anglican church; it will contain Pentecostals but *not* the whole Elim/AOG denominations. It will also contain Methodists, Baptists, even those caught up in very dodgy, dubious churches. It will hopefully contain you and your church. There will be those who would call themselves Calvinists, Arminians, pre-millenialists and the rest of the labels we attach to ourselves. But don't worry about that, God won't let our doctrinal differences get in the way of our destiny!

He knows His Cinderella Church. We are the ones who are possibly going to be surprised as to who we will share a cloud with when we *join the heavenly choir* (if that's what you choose to believe).

Chapter Two: Anything goes ...

Here are a few scenarios that have crossed my path over the past few years. A very well-known Christian teacher, acting as an 'agony uncle' for a magazine, stated that Muslims probably had a chance to get to heaven. A world-famous author wrote that monogamous homosexual relationships were probably OK with Jesus. Leaders of a national denomination denied that God can still act in judgement over His people, through natural phenomena such as bolts of lightning. Then there were the TV discussions where some scientists confessed that they felt more connected to an atheist than a fellow Christian just because of doctrinal differences.

What's the connection? They are all Christians, but what they see when they open the pages of the Bible may be very different to what others see. To understand how they feel able to believe what they believe, we are going on a short journey in time.

In 1771, the highly influential Encyclopaedia Britannica was first published, as a three volume set. Let's have a quick look at two of its pages. On page 493, in the astronomy section, it states that the World was created on 4007BC and on page 414 it talks about the universal deluge that covered the World and how Noah's ark survived it. It also contains an article that scientifically proved that the ark would have been big enough to hold all of the animals.

In 1853, the eighth edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica said the following about The Flood:

"The insuperable difficulties connected with the belief that all other existing species of animals were provided for in the ark are obviated by adopting the suggestion of Bishop Stillingfleet, approved by Matthew Poole...and others, that the Deluge did not extend beyond the region of the Earth then inhabited".

Doubts had started to creep in. We move onto the ninth edition, in 1875. This time The Flood story was recorded without comment, implying that debate on this issue was not considered important or relevant enough. Skipping a few generations, the 1960 edition contained an article that said:

"Before the days of 'higher criticism' and the rise of the modern scientific views as to the origin of the species, there was much discussion among the learned, and many ingenious and curious theories were advanced, as to the number of animals on the ark".

So what we observe here is the growing irrelevance of the Noah's Ark story thanks to the rise of scientific thinking and the whole story is relegated to the status of legend, with a condescending quip about how pointless it is to argue about the number of animals there were on the ark, when the whole story is probably myth anyway.

Before the days of 'higher criticism' and the rise of modern scientific views ...

Higher Criticism seems to have made a difference in the way we read and understand the Bible. So what is it?

There's a hard way and a simple way to describe it. Being a simple person, I will simply say that it is using our intellects and analytical tools to tear the Bible apart as one would do any other book and see who *really* wrote it and what does it *really* say. It totally ignores what the Bible says about itself:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Wielding the scalpel of our analytical tools of Biblical criticism is like conducting an autopsy on a living body. We need to ask ourselves, how did these scholars feel able to do this? How can they not see that the Bible, God's living words of instruction to us, *is not like any other book?* The following few paragraphs, taken from my book, *How the Church Lost the Truth*, and embellished with some extra explanations where needed, set the scene:

In the 8th Century the works of the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, were discovered by the Muslims and translated by the Jews into the languages of the day. Aristotle's main teaching was to encourage rational thought and the use of the senses in observing the World around you. By introducing the concept of *rationalism* into the religious cul-

turcs of thc Jcws, Muslims and Christians, it is fair to say that the damage done was immense. These ideas were taken up by the most influential Christian philosopher of the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas, who created a religious system combining faith and reason, stating that even the existence of God was not to be taken as a given but through analysis of information that could be gathered by the senses.

The genie had been let out and the subsequent rise of rationalism was to eat away at the certainties of faith. State Christianity became more of a philosophic system to be argued over rather than a supernatural expression of God's plans for mankind. This was not helped by the corruptions of the Catholic Church and its use of pagan practices to control the ordinary people. Something had to give and it was Martin Luther who provided the spark of a *Reformation* in the Church, a new beginning.

Yet even the Reformers were not free from Greek influences, but it was the accent on the rationalism of Aristotle that was to spearhead thc next major attack on thc Christian Church, which has lasted from the end of the Middle Ages right up until today. First came the *Renaissance*, the "rebirth", the flowering of culture and artistic expression in Italy, believe it or not inspired by the ideals of Ancient Greece! This was also the birth of *Humanism*, a movement that placed man at the centre of everything, rather than God. Then came the philosophers of the *Enlightenment*,

who built on these ideas and eventually totally did away with the need for God at all, replacing Him with their own rational ideas. This was the birth of *Individualism*, which has now become the defining feature of modern society.

Although God made something of a comeback thanks to the Methodist movement, followed by the awakenings of the 18th and 19th Centuries, prompting a massive worldwide missionary movement, we largely entered an age of confusion and division. This was the age of new cults, such as Christian Science and the Jehovah's Witnesses, borne out of the ancient Greek heresies. It was also an age of a fight back by the Catholics, with strange new doctrines such as the *immaculate conception*. There were the Deists, who believed in some kind of absentee landlord God and then there was Charles Darwin and his ideas, to further chip away at the ancient faith, with the mallet of human reason and scientific methodology. And out of Germany came *Higher Criticism*, a new way to disbelieve the Bible.

One of the basic methodologies of Higher Criticism would be to look at each book, in both Old and New Testaments and re-evaluate them in terms of authorship and intention, by analysing the literary genres used, other ancient literature, as well as historical knowledge of Biblical times. This is a worthy enterprise if you have any reasons to doubt the book you are investigating, in terms of

content or authorship. Any reasons to doubt ... doubt ... DOUBT.

... he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. (James 1:6)

This conjures up an image of drifting without a foundation or an anchor to cling onto. Being at the mercy of the wind implies a lack of certainty and lays you open to all sorts of dangers. Here we see it explained so:

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. (Ephesians 4:14)

It is interesting that a watershed moment in recent history regarding these matters, was the Scopes "Monkey" trial in 1925, with a stand-off between supporters of the Biblical Creation account (taking six literal days) and the Theory of Evolution. This was made into a play and a film, entitled "Inherit the Wind".

The title of the play is from Proverbs:

He who brings trouble on his family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise. (Proverbs 11:29)

Whatever the reasons for using this quote for the title of the play, these words are worth heeding. We Christians are a family, one big (but not necessarily happy) family! We don't want to inherit the wind of bad teaching, we only seek to bring our family together in truth.

That is the purpose of this book. It may seem that there's a lot of criticising going on here, but it's all done in love, a sincere desire to bring healing to the Body of Christ and to anchor us all in the truth of God's Word.

Now, out of this *higher criticism* came a new form of Christianity, one that very much mixed up Bible truths with the patterns of this World. Paul had seen this coming:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

There was a new kid in town, flexing his muscles. His name was *Liberal Christianity* and the Bible now found itself in some new battles. A good definition of Liberal Christianity is the one given in Wikipedia:

"Thus, liberal Christian theologians do not claim to discover truth propositions but rather create religious models and concepts that reflect the class, gender, social, and political contexts from which they emerge. Liberal Christianity looks upon the Bible as a collection of narratives that explain, epitomize, or symbolize the essence and significance of Christian understanding. Thus, most liberal Christians do not regard the Bible as inerrant, but believe Scripture to be "inspired" in the same way a poem is said to be "inspired" and passed down by humans".

So what we have here is the triumph of the rational mind, the scientific approach to the

Bible. Rather than let the Bible speak in the timeless way that it has always done, these new theologians are creating models, clevernesses from their own minds, using the Bible as a source of concepts rather than absolute truth.

One of their first "contributions" was to tear the Gospels to pieces. In the nineteenth century David Strauss wrote a *Life of Jesus* in which he stripped out any *miraculous* events, as they would have come from the imagination of the community as it told and retold these stories. Ernest Renan, in his *Vie de Jesus*, went even further, embellishing the gospel narratives with his own psychological insights into Jesus and his motivations. This tickled the public and it was popular enough to be reprinted eight times in three months.

These liberal Christians wanted to major on the moral teachings of Jesus as a standard for society, but tried to do this by stripping out all supernatural elements. Even today, modern liberal Christians would tend to see the miracles of Jesus as metaphors for the power of God, rather than actual events.

It is time to return to the examples given at the head of the Chapter, all of which you will now identify as natural consequences of the rise of Liberal Christianity, particularly in the UK. First, the 'agony uncle', who stated that Muslims probably had a chance to get to heaven. His comment was of the nature, *how do we really know who gets into heaven and, anyway, who are we to judge?*

Now Jesus was very clear on this matter:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

There's no way to read this verse (and others that say similar) other than the fact that the only way we are going to get to heaven is through our faith in Jesus and what he did for us.

We can, of course, make use of *logic* by making some assumptions and then arriving at a conclusion. But if that conclusion is anything other than what John 14:6 is telling us, then our assumptions are probably going to be false, and those assumptions will be formed from our individual needs, agendas and prejudices. For instance, our 'agony uncle' here will start with the general statement that God is merciful (as He is) and loving (as He also is) and will come to the *reasonable* conclusion that everyone is going to be saved, because God doesn't really want anyone to go to Hell.

Yes, but equally we can make the general statement that God is a righteous God and the only way we can be in the presence of a righteous God (i.e. in heaven) is through Jesus' redemptive act on the cross. So our conclusion here is that *no-one comes to the Father except through Jesus.* This happens to be true but this use of *logic* is not the way to come to the conclusion. Instead we use *Bible logic* – the simple process of just reading the words of Scripture - and start with John 14:6,

a specific statement that we know to be true, as well as those other Scriptures that agree with it and come to the general conclusion – that *only believers in Jesus are saved.*

Then there's that author who wrote that monogamous homosexual relationships were probably OK with Jesus. He is not taking this assertion from Scripture, as Jesus never spoke specifically of this. So he is not using *Bible logic*, instead he is making general statements based on his own take on Jesus' character and coming to a conclusion that he's not even sure about himself (through the use of the word "probably"). In other words, it's just *his* view, nothing to do with what's actually true!

Then we had the leaders of a national denomination denying that God can still act in judgement over His people, through natural phenomena such as bolts of lightning. Those old enough to remember this event in the 1980s will know it involved the unexpected and mysterious lightning strike on the steeple of York Minister three days after the consecration of an extremely liberal Christian (David Jenkins, who believed in neither the virgin birth or the bodily resurrection of Jesus) as Bishop of Durham.

There are two issues here. Firstly the idea that God doesn't involve himself in acts of judgement and doesn't do much smiting any more is not a concept that can be found anywhere in the Bible. It's the main idea of a corruption called *Deism*, one of the early ver-

sions of Liberal Christianity. Deists believe that God just got the world and everything started, then left the rest to us. *Just doesn't get personally involved anymore.* This was still alive and well in the 1980s, so it seems, particularly as the Anglican hierarchy would have preferred this to the other possibility – God's displeasure in the consecration of a heretic!

Which brings us to David Jenkins. How can someone become the Bishop of Durham (the third highest ranking Anglican in the land) without believing in what we would call the *minimum requirements* to being a Christian, the fact that Jesus had a physical resurrection? If this is the natural consequence of Liberal Christianity it would be interesting to see how we actually got from Higher Criticism to David Jenkins.

What were his credentials? He gained an MA at Oxford University and trained at Lincoln Theological College. He taught theology at Oxford and became Professor of Theology at Leeds University. He was also chaplain at a variety of places and had written many books on theology. So there's evidence that he knew his stuff and that he was a clever man. But, in 1984, he was asked, on the *Credo* programme on Channel 4, whether he believed that Jesus rose from the dead. This is what he answered:

"Well, I hold the view that he rose from the dead. The question is what that means, isn't it? I think I should like to say that it doesn't seem to

me, reading the records as they remain in both the Gospels and what Paul says in 1 Corinthians, that there was any one event which you could identify with the Resurrection. What seems to me to have happened is that there were a series of experiences which gradually convinced a growing number of the people who became apostles that Jesus had certainly been dead, certainly buried and he wasn't finished. And what is more he wasn't just not finished but he was "raised up", that is to say, the very life and power and purpose and personality which was in him was actually continuing and was continuing both in the sphere of God and in the sphere of history so that he was a risen and living presence and possibility."

In other words, by evading the question and giving such a fuzzy answer, he tried to minimise the fact that he did not believe that Jesus had a resurrection body, despite what Scripture says:

He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' "(Luke 24:6-7)

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (1 Corinthians 15:12-14)

Now Jenkins was a theologian and he would have been aware of this verse in 1 Corinthians. So either he believed his faith was useless or that resurrection from the dead means something other than a body returning from the dead. His fuzzy answer above seemed to indicate a "re-interpretation".

So, Liberal Christians (because Jenkins is not alone in his beliefs here), in stripping out the supernatural from the Bible, do not give themselves any room to believe what is the cornerstone in belief in Jesus, a bodily resurrection. So, instead they have to *de-spiritualise* the plain text of Scripture, as he did in the nonsense answer that he gave to the interviewer.

Later on, he came straight to the point, when pressed:

"I personally do not know whether the grave was empty or not. The evidence of the texts, the nature of the tradition and the general facts about the way people all over the world rapidly believe appropriate stories to support the religious beliefs leave me wholly uncertain about the Empty Tomb as literal historical fact."

So he was able to accept the uncontroversial parts of the Bible, such as the actual existence of Jesus and his teachings, as history but when his Liberal Christian agenda was challenged at its deepest level, all he could come out with was doubt and uncertainty.

... he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. (James 1:6)

What we are observing here is an important point, how we all come to faith in different ways and are exposed to different influences. As Christians we all gravitate towards the model of Christianity that makes us feel most comfortable. Once we make this decision we tend to stick to it, that is our basic nature. The problem comes when the model starts creaking a bit and doesn't answer all of the questions. In these cases, do we have the humility and the awareness to adjust or look beyond our model? In such times we must turn to the One who lives beyond any model we may create and ask what He thinks.

Finally there was the episode of the scientist who felt more connected to an atheist than a fellow Christian because of doctrinal differences. We can see this as an example of our inherited Greek mindset, with its emphasis on analysing and thinking, of doctrine over practice and we ask ourselves that, in our disagreements over doctrine with other Christians, are we more interested in proving our point, or remaining in fellowship? Greek thinking is focussed on *being right*, Hebraic thinking concentrates on being in *right relationships*.

I think I know which one God prefers.

Chapter Three: Onwards Christian shirkers ...

... marching back to bed!

Well that's the last straw, how dare he! It does seem quite a harsh statement to make, to say nothing of the plundering of an old Christian battle-hymn! But this is very much the story of my own life.

I was never one for going to Church in the early days. It was a strain for me from Day One. After all, I was a 32 year old married man with no comforting childhood tradition to tap into, this was no prodigal return, no sepia-toned nostalgic trip to better days. As a fan of heavy rock guitar music, Tiswas and the Goon Show, the last thing I wanted to do was to dress nicely and have my hair forcibly combed by wifey, then dragged into this fun-starved stained-glass prison, where I would have to sing simplistic dirges and generally be nice and polite. Let's just say there were a lot of rough edges to deal with in those days.

As it turned out, I quickly adapted and the Church we went to was one of the better ones, with a multicultural mix of people, that appealed to our combined Jewish/German/Polish/Catholic heritage. Still not a great fan of the music (or being nice and polite), but my Sunday outings were generally a place of spiritual growth. The philosophy of St Andrews was to ease new converts in, not to throw too much at them at once, which was fine by me. We soon had our regular unoffi-

cial pew placement, with me sitting at the far end, ready for any quick getaway if things got too heavy!

In those days, although my private – let us say academic – development as a Christian was going quite well, with a growing tape library and a mind that was devouring all kinds of Christian books at an alarming rate, it was the *social side* that was lacking. In other words I was feeding the Greek nature (thinking, analysing, pondering), but neglecting the Hebraic nature (doing stuff that Christians were meant to do and cultivating relationships). To be honest I was painfully shy, happy to remain pew-fodder and positively alarmed at the threatened new adventure of going to a mid-week home group!

Can't one be a private Christian? Why involve other people? These were my thoughts at that time and, if it wasn't for the efforts of others, wifey included, I would have remained a solitary little island within my own world, a natural introvert who saw no need for change. God had other plans for me and brought me kicking and screaming into this alien landscape of *other people* ... and it actually started growing on me.

I was a *Christian shirker*, content with feeding the inner life but generally unwilling to dip my toe into real Christian living. To be honest, this is still my inclination, but the difference is that I now know it is a wrong one.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

God has a plan for all of us and, whether we like it or not, it's always going to involve other people. It *has* to, I can't see God giving us skills for any other reason, except to give back to Him, in the form of good works to others.

I think many of us are trapped by our inherited and taught Greek natures to think otherwise.

I had originally rested in the thought that the sole purpose of the Christian life was *personal salvation*, to be saved, then go to heaven and live there happily ever after. I saw God as the captain of this great celestial liner, tossing out lifebelts to those He had selected, then watching as these blessed souls lived the rest of their lives safely cosseted by these life-saving adornments, with nothing to do but wait for the day of their final rescue.

It all boils down to one question. *Is it enough just to be saved, or are we meant to "do works" too?* A lot of theological hot-air has been exhaled on this subject and I'm just going to suggest a new approach to this question. It was a foundational question for the Protestant reformers and was expressed in their slogan, *sola fide*, faith alone. It also led to an extreme view, called *antinomianism*, where the very thought of law or works is frowned upon with disdain.

We can look at this debate in two ways. The first way is the *Greek* way, where we lock horns over Scripture, depending on whether we are following Paul (in Romans, Ephesians and Galatians) or James (in his letter). First, in Paul's corner we give you the following:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. (Romans 3:28)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (Romans 5:1)

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

These seem to be clear cut, with the primacy on faith.

Then, James gives us the following:

You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. (James 2:24)

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. (James 2:17-18)

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? (James 2:14)

So, what's it to be? Faith alone, *sola fide*, as declared by Martin Luther, the Reformer (who

had quite a low view of the Book of James), or *faith plus deeds*, as the apostle James is telling us?

Who's right and who's wrong? Is it a matter of context or is one Biblical letter writer to be held at a higher esteem?

Or ... can they both be right? This ought to be our approach to Holy Scripture, as God would not have allowed any falsehoods in His words. And this brings us to the second way to reading these words ... the *Hebraic* way.

If the Greek way is to argue over words and their meaning and to retrench into our chosen corner when there appears to be conflicting verses, the Hebraic way looks elsewhere for inspiration. The Hebraic way would look first at the Author of the words and ask, *knowing the character of the Author, what is He saying here, and what isn't He saying?*

It would look at the Paul passages and agree with the fact that one's works won't get you saved, only faith is going to do that. Then it would look at James and agree with the fact that once we are saved, if there's no evidence of a changed life, through one's works, then there's something wrong here! If faith has not resulted in deeds, then how can that person be truly saved? It gives a lie to the work that the Holy Spirit does in us:

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. (Matthew 3:8)

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Romans 12:2)

Remember, straight after Paul tells us that we have been saved by faith ...

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

He then tells us that this faith must *result* in good works.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

So the Hebraic mind tries to get inside God's mind and make Him the centre of our thinking, before we start to analyse (or dissect) His Words.

Now do you think Almighty God, Creator of the Heavens and the Earth would allow His son to die a horrific, painful death on the Cross to atone for the sins of mankind, in order that some of us could just bide time on this earth, existing solely for the spiritual rewards of the next life?

If we have inclined ourselves to this opinion then there have been historical precedents for this and we really need to learn from history in order to move on in our Christian life. Here it is in a nutshell:

From the middle of the 1st Century onwards, once the generation of Jewish apostles and disciples had died out, the reins of the

Church were grabbed by the Gentile Church fathers, most of whom were well versed in pagan Greek philosophy, notably that of Plato. The major effect of this was to introduce the mistaken, non-Biblical idea that there is a separation between the physical and the spiritual. This led to artificial divisions in the Church and Christian thinking, between the body and the soul, the natural and the supernatural, the holy and the profane.

On the practical level it even divided the Body of Christ into two classifications, the *clergy* (the spiritual "professional" Christians) and the *laity* (the rest of us). This idea has been re-inforced ever since, giving the mistaken belief that only a small group of us (the clergy) are called into full-time Christian service. The rest of us (the laity) are the ones who are "served" and pay for this "privilege", usually financially.

There are two outcomes to this, both affecting us today, if we only realised it. During the *Dark Ages*, the "Christian" world had sunk to such a low that the common man hadn't a clue what he *really* needed to do to be saved. The Bible was only available in Latin, the language of the clergy, which didn't really matter as the general public was illiterate. Lives were so brutally short that the clergy taught folk that only by performing rituals in Church, could they get to heaven and that their lives on earth were hardly worth living, so at least they had something to look forwards to. A historian wrote the following:

The new kind of Christians, after the fall (of Rome), had little interest in their bodies as such. They cared about the health of their souls. They had no interest in consumption. They could lose their reputation rather than gain it for possessing wealth in a society where poverty was next to godliness. Roman wealth was replaced by Christian poverty. (A History of Knowledge, Charles Van Doren p. 96, Ballantine Books 1992)

There is every possibility that this thinking is still with us, even if in the milder form of *not being interested in fulfilling their potential on earth because surely God has something better waiting for us in Heaven.*

The other outcome is a more obvious one. We *still* have clergy and laity. The clergy these days also come in plain-clothed varieties, in pastors, worship leaders, writers, prophets, apostles and Christian leaders. These are our full-time Christian workers, earning their livelihood through exercising their God-given gifts. The tendency is for the laity to hand over all *spiritual* tasks to these "professional Christians", to leave the rest of us to live our secular lives for ourselves. You can see here the subtle influence of Plato's philosophy still with us – the *separation* of our lives into the spiritual and the secular. A symptom of this is the situation when a tramp or needy person wanders into the Church – *hold on, I'll just go and fetch the vicar, he'll pray for you / help you out financially / feed you / clothe you* ...

And there lies the problem and an "acceptable" refuge for a Christian shirker. *We still think we're the laity!*

We're not.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:5-6)

We are *all* priests to serve God, we don't just anoint the special ones to intercede for us, as they did in Old Testament times.

But we still think we're the laity. We are still used to elevating others to "minister" to us. We lay our hands on our TV sets because the "prophet" has told us we can *catch the anointing* that way. We allow our favourite trusted teachers to feed our spirits without *examining their words against the plumbline of the Bible*, seemingly bypassing our God-given critical faculties. We bind ourselves to TV ministries, attracted by the promised blessings and "financial rewards" or just because they look honest and speak well.

We are still dependent on professional Christians. We need to break free from the pews, take charge of our own Christian development and behave like the Bereans:

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

It's not easy sometimes, especially for those of us who are natural introverts. God doesn't see the barriers that we create for ourselves. My barrier was the fear of speaking to a group of people. I would avoid it wherever I could until the day came ... when I couldn't any more. I was literally thrown on stage by my mother to be M.C. at an early event held by our Messianic fellowship (Tree of Life), simply because there was no-one else available. I did it and ... reluctantly ... quite enjoyed it and found myself quite natural at it. It didn't suddenly open up a brand new ministry of public speaking in stadiums and conference halls, but it did convince me that, when push came to shove, *I could do it.*

This fact was brought to mind after my first few published books were hardly flying off the shelves and I realised that *I needed to get out there* and do some promotions in Churches and Messianic fellowships. This involved speaking to the public – let's face it, I would rather eat quiche (private joke) than speak at a Church - and set off a chain of events, culminating in wifey and I now organising a set of conferences, where I have been front man and teacher. God can use anybody. If he can take a tongue-tied introvert and give him the courage (and the words) to speak in front of over a hundred people at a time, then it's time you fellow shirkers out there took note and allowed God to help you break any barriers you may have to really using the gifts He has given you.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

Noting that these gifts all seem to involve interactions with other people, I had always accepted these as a theoretical possibility but a personal no-go area. But, even more telling are the next few verses:

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14)

You know the foot-related nursery rhyme ... *and this little piggy stayed at home*? Well that may not be where God is calling you and for us all to function as a part of the wider body we may need to leave our comfort zones and venture forth.

This is one of the key ideas behind our conferences, the *Foundations* conferences held at Quinta Christian Conference Centre - this book is being launched at Foundations 4. The conferences are for people to come and find out where they fit into the Body of Messiah. *Foundations* is not just about teaching and instruction, but about contributing, networking and exploration. If you want to talk about something you own that is part of your testimony, then we encourage you to bring it along for a "show and tell". If you play a musical instrument, then bring it! We have seen many people energised and motivated into "finding their gifts" at our conferences and the best advert for them is that, even though the first three conferences were held over a 14 month period, around half of those who came to the third one had already been to at least one of the first two!

We must rid ourselves of the safety blanket of hiding among the "laity". Shirkers of the world unite ... and get out of bed!

Chapter Four: His pain, my blame.

For three hours the world was in darkness. It wasn't night-time, the sky wasn't heavy with storm clouds and it certainly wasn't an eclipse. It was a one-time act of God, so there was a purpose to it.

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. (Matthew 27:45)

Have you thought how frightening that must have been, not the least for those few who stood facing the three crosses at Golgotha, just outside Jerusalem, having already watched the Saviour of mankind writhing in agony through the tortures of crucifixion, for the last three hours? *At last his ordeal must be over now*, they must have thought, unaware that *the worst was about to come*!

That three hour darkness. How must it have seemed to those who *weren't* present at the crucifixion of Jesus? Here's where the Bible breaks out into the history books, to the consternation of the secular God-bashers, because there is historical evidence for this darkness. Two pagan (non-Christian) historians, Thallus the Roman and Phlegon the Greek, mention it, citing the reason as a solar eclipse. This, of course, is probably the only rational conclusion they could have made (although it was scientifically impossible), but the point is that a reason had to be found for a phenomenon that *historically* took place. Even more compelling is the fact that

Thallus was writing just a few years after the event and so would have been an eye-witness (of the event, not the crucifixion).

The worst was about to come? What can be worse than the physical agony of crucifixion?

An event so horrific and upsetting that three hours of darkness was needed to spare the sanity of the witnesses of the crucifixion. Their eyes were protected from the scene on the cross. Before we discuss this, it's back to basics for us.

Have you ever wondered what "died for our sins" actually means and how it was accomplished? We now find ourselves at the edge of a minefield in the middle of swamp land, populated by the product of great theological brains and swirling with the hot vapours of discussion, some of it quite vitriolic.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3)

What does it mean? Quite a lot of possibilities, apparently. There seem to be at least eight possibilities.

The *Christus Victor* (or the *ransom*) view states that Christ died to "buy back" humanity from Satan, who has "owned" us since the Fall. The *Governmental view* has Christ suffering on the cross as a demonstration of God's displeasure with our sin and appeasing His wrath that we deserve. The *Moral influence view* has all acts of Christ, including his willingness to die on the cross, as a moral example for us to follow. This gives him the

role as the *first martyr* (though the only resurrected one). The *Recapitulation theory* has Jesus as the second Adam, succeeding where the first failed and leading us into eternal life. The *Mystical view* has Christ triumphing over his own sinful nature, which would awake some sort of "god-consciousness" in us. The *Satisfaction theory* states that Christ died as a satisfactory substitute for the sins of humanity by restoring honour to God, lost because of our sins. The *Penal Substitution theory* also states that Christ died as a satisfactory substitute for the sins of humanity, but as a punishment, saving us from the consequences of these sins. There are more theories and variations on the above, but we really *don't need* to go to these places!

Oh God, save us ... from the complexities of our theologians. Is this such a complicated topic that we can't come up with one solid definition that we can all understand? Perhaps we aren't meant to understand it? Is an understanding of the mechanism of the *atonement* necessary for our salvation? If so, then there are millions of Christians going to the "other place" because they don't have the benefit of an understanding of philosophy or theology. To be frank, I am tempted to give up and include myself in this latter category. After all, do I have the credentials to add my views to those who have written books on the subject, spoken on it at conferences and symposiums and have argued its points in heated debates?

So let us leave the Greek debating chamber and return to God's word.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3)

And what are those Scriptures Paul is referring to? Here are the main ones:

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:28)

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. (Romans 3:25)

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, (Galatians 1:4)

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.' (Galatians 3:13)

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, (Hebrews 10:11-12)

'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.' (1 Peter 2:24)

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. (1 Peter 3:18)

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

Read them in one go then mull them over. What are they saying? What are the themes? In summary I see Jesus shedding blood for us, taking on this punishment on our behalf and somehow dealing with our sins and providing us with a form of righteousness (good standing before God).

This is interesting, because *only one* of the theories of atonement listed earlier seem to fit this theme. This is troubling, because surely those theologians have been reading the same Scriptures as I have? Yes, I'm sure they have ... but they are all encumbered by *other* factors. As I've already discussed in my other books (*How the Church Lost the Way/Truth*), commentators all tend to come with personal agendas, whether it's a background in philosophy, or a denominational party line. If you don't believe me, then trace the history of all of these theories of the atonement and see *who* first postulated them and *why* they postulated them. It's interesting and revealing.

So where does that leave us? It seems that modern Christians who have a view of the matter seem to follow either the *moral influence* camp or the *penal substitution* camp. The moral influence view is also known as the *subjective view*, which is a very telling definition, placing it very firmly as a human response to the cross, rather than a God-centred explanation. It is the preferred view of liberal Christians and stresses God's love, with Christ's death on the cross as the supreme expression of this love. There's nothing wrong with that as an observation, but is it the *whole story*? It doesn't seem so to me, as it doesn't really address the persistent scripture, "Christ died for my sins". How does it deal with my sins? How does it address the Old Testament narrative of the Fall and our separation from God?

The *penal substitution view* of the atonement is the only one that seems to fit the theme developed in those Scriptures listed above. To remind you, it states that Christ died as a satisfactory substitute for the sins of humanity, but as a punishment, saving us from the consequences of these sins. But what a name! A real turn-off to us average Joes! Penal substitution? What does that really mean? Actually, to theologians it's a good name. "Penal" refers to the need for punishment (as in the word "penalty") and "substitution" alludes to Christ taking it for us. So we *deserve* the punishment because of our sins, but Christ takes it for us and, by doing so, gives us a right-

cousness that we don't deserve, but allows us to be reconciled to God, who hates sin.

Now look at the heading of this chapter. This, I suggest, is a more user-friendly way to understand what Christ did for us, when he died for our sins.

His pain, my blame. Also, *His shame, my gain.*

Jesus suffered the pain, for which we must take the blame. He also suffered the shame on our behalf, for the gain to us of our sins dealt with.

There can be no more important doctrine. Paul certainly thought so.

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)

Yet the theologians, with their myriad of theories have over-complicated it all. Motivated by their Greek mindset, convincing them that they are right and everyone else is wrong, they often allow this to create discord with Christian brothers and sisters and breaks in fellowship. This has recently happened in the UK Church, as a result of some writings of the liberal Christian, Steve Chalke, and the repercussions of his clumsy attack on penal substitution, leading to splits and plenty of hot air. If you don't believe me, here's what he said:

John's Gospel famously declares, "God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son" How then, have we come to believe

that at the cross this God of love suddenly decides to vent his anger and wrath on his Son? The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse – a vengeful Father, punishing his son for an offence that he has not commited ....
[Chalke & Mann, Lost Message, 182]

His use of the term *cosmic child abuse* was like a red rag to a whole herd of bulls and led to a lot of "less than loving" responses. Should Christians really be having these verbal jousts in the public arena? Should they be using such provocative language? Should they be venting their collective spleens? Who benefits from these verbal spats? Certainly not the Body of Christ.

The liberal camp stress the love of God, as expressed in Christ's sacrificial act. The conservative camp stress the justice of God, expressed in His outpouring of wrath to His son on the cross because of the sins of humanity. Can we not see both as valid? Does it have to be so black and white? Although I recognise the importance of *Penal Substitution* as an explanation of the mechanism, I can also appreciate the heart of the *Moral Influence* view, as an expression of God's love for us. This is a feature of the Hebraic mindset, holding truths in tension.

We now return to earlier on, when I left you dangling over a cliff. I suggested that, when darkness descended at noon on that day of crucifixion, *the worst was about to come!*

What could have been worse than the physical agony of crucifixion? Isaiah spoke hundreds of years earlier about this.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)

He was ... crushed for our iniquities ... the punishment that brought us peace was on him ...

It was during those three hours that the sinless Christ ... took on our sins. Every sin that had ever been committed (and every sin which would ever be committed) was dealt with in those three hours.

God was pouring out His wrath on His beloved son ... and it wasn't pretty. Hence the darkness.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Romans 5:8-10)

It wasn't nice, but it was necessary. We will no doubt be spending most of eternity thanking him for it.

Chapter Five: Why apologise?

Apologetics? Couldn't they have come up with a better word? The first impression is that we're so ashamed to be believers in God that we have to apologise for it! But, then the second impression, once we have looked it up, is that it comes from the Greek word that means "speaking in defence". Here's Paul speaking:

"King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I ***make my defence (= apolgeomai)*** *against all the accusations of the Jews,* (Acts 26:2)

Recently I was (loosely) involved with the UK tour of one of the World's top Christian apologists, allegedly the only person that Richard Dawkins refuses to debate with. The tour was a sell out and featured battles (jousting with words, not long pointy sticks) in large packed halls, with sometimes as many as 2000 people, most of them Christians. And the main subject debated was "Does God exist?"

Does God exist? Now *that's* a question!

Another question is, *why do so many Christians come to such debates?* Many, like those in the Roman arenas of old, are there to watch their champions fight battles, gladiators of debate, using powerful words and silky rhetoric as weapons to defeat the enemy. But perhaps some are there *because they have doubts themselves*, and need reassurances.

This is troubling. Faith and doubt, the battle that all Christians fight to a certain extent, though not all of us care to admit it. So when did Christians start to doubt? Did some

start to question things like Woody Allen, the comedian, who said: *"How can I believe in God when just last week I got my tongue caught in the roller of an electric typewriter?"*

There is a group called "Sea of Faith" that has been set up to *explore the implications of understanding religious faith as a human creation.* In other words, *how can we order our world knowing that God doesn't exist?* Well, you may be interested to know that, according to a report a few years back, it claims it has *"up to 50 vicars and some Roman Catholic priests in its membership, as well as rank and file church members."*

This is the worst outcome of the process outlined in an earlier Chapter, the rise and rise of the liberal strand of Christianity in the UK. We talked about David Jenkins, the Bishop of Durham in the 1980s, who believed neither in the virgin Birth nor the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. That would have been enough to condemn him as a heretic in earlier times. But, it seems, the process of liberalisation, with the encroachment of wave after wave of doubt, has resulted in its ultimate expression. The question now increasingly voiced even by a few from within the Christian community:

Does God exist?

For us Christians, God is *surely* a given. It's the stuff we add onto that basic fact that gets us all in a tizz. But some have been brought to that *darkest night of the soul* and have allowed themselves to sink into a swamp of doubt.

Well it all goes back to the middle ages to that Italian Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas, already mentioned in an earlier Chapter. Thomas Aquinas, *Christian philosopher,* who set the ball rolling for the relentless rise of reason at the expense of faith as the Western world moved through the Renaissance, then the Enlightenment, resulting in the current prevalent philosophy, that of *secular humanism*. Has there been a philosophy that screams NO to God as much as this one?! We are *secular* (we are of the World) and we are *humanist* (man-centred)! The God-centred *Hebraic Mindset* has found its fiercest foe. And within this philosophy are a group of people, the *New Atheists,* who brazenly and fearlessly declare their agenda, as a clenched fist to the *Great ("non-existent") Father in the Sky*. Here are some quotes from them.

"*There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life*". Ariane Sherine (founder of Atheist Bus Campaign)

"*The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.*" (Richard Dawkins)

"The Bible may, indeed does, contain a warrant for trafficking in humans, for ethnic cleansing, for slavery, for bride-price, and for indiscriminate massacre, but we are not bound by any of it because it was put together by crude, uncultured human mammals." (Christopher Hitchens)

"We know enough at this moment to say that the God of Abraham is not only unworthy of the immensity of creation; he is unworthy even of man." (Sam Harris)

It's nasty, vindictive stuff, though it undoubtedly sells books and guarantees a voice on the anti-Christian media. They should be thankful that we have freedom of speech here, though I can't see many book tours for these gentlemen in Muslim countries, despite the focus of their bile being the Christian God. And they must surely be thankful that they don't live at the time of the Spanish inquisition!

Yet, vitriol aside, there has to be a core of valid concerns at the heart of the debate. Do they have any good arguments that could help us understand how to reach these people, or at least those who are influenced by them? Some hints came from an unusual source, the comedian Ricky Gervais (from "The Office"), a famous celebrity atheist, who even has a stage act taking the mickey out of Christians. He recently posted a lengthy article on his blog on why he's an atheist. It was honest and helpful and made a nice change to get an insight into the atheist's mindset

without having to put up with the hatefulness so typical of Dawkins and his friends. Here are a few extracts, with some observations by me:

"I don't believe in God because there is absolutely no scientific evidence for his existence and from what I've heard the very definition is a logical impossibility in this known universe."

This is a classic embodiment of the Greek mindset, rejecting anything that can't be detected by the five senses or analysed rationally. The Hebraic Mindset is so alien to the fallen state of mankind that God is literally reasoned out of existence.

"I'm not saying faith doesn't exist. I know faith exists. I see it all the time. But believing in something doesn't make it true. Hoping that something is true doesn't make it true. The existence of God is not subjective. He either exists or he doesn't. It's not a matter of opinion. You can have your own opinions. But you can't have your own facts."

There is nothing wrong with these statements at all as general principles. God either exists or He doesn't. The problem with atheists is that they are not looking for Him in the right places, or prefer not to consider those places because they are scared what they may find there. This latter point is denied, of course, but many atheists have a *history* with God (or the Church), and use their newly-discovered "disbelief" as their refuge. Their hope is that their disbelief would just make the problem go away.

"It's strange that anyone who believes that an all-powerful all-knowing, omniscient power responsible for everything that happens, would also want to judge and punish people for what they are."

From his perspective this is a perfectly valid point to make. Unless you have faith that God is who He says He is, the all-powerful, all-knowing, omniscient (same thing really) Being, you are not going to accept the reality of *the rest of the package* – of our sinfulness weighed up against His holiness and righteousness, with the due consequences. The difficulty in our evangelism is getting this point across in a loving manner, particularly to disinterested or closed minds.

"When confronted with anyone who holds my lack of religious faith in such contempt, I say, 'It's the way God made me.'"

Yes, Mr Gervais, but God can also change you. All it needs is your open and willing heart.

"I learned of evolution — a theory so simple that only England's greatest genius could have come up with it. Evolution of plants, animals and us -- with imagination, free will, love, humor. I no longer needed a reason for my existence, just a reason to live. And imagination, free will, love, humor, fun, music, sports, beer and pizza are all good enough reasons for living."

That's fine, but there's a flip-side to a life without ultimate hope. It can also be short and brutishly unfair. Not everyone has access to music, sports, beer and pizza. It can

be a life lived for personal pleasure, something that our secular society encourages. And, anyway, what's evolution got to do with it and, if evolution applies also to human beings, there is absolutely no (scientific) evidence that we are any different to how we were thousands of years ago. Scientific progress may have given us electric toothbrushes, but there is still evil in our hearts and we still can't get on with each other any more than the ancient Romans could.

"But living an honest life — for that you need the truth. That's the other thing I learned that day, that the truth, however shocking or uncomfortable, in the end leads to liberation and dignity."

Agree with you there, Ricky. Where have you found the truth? To revisit your quote about God, "The existence of truth is not subjective. It either exists or it doesn't. It's not a matter of opinion. You can have your own opinions, but you can't have your own truth." We Christians believe we have found absolute truth and it gives true freedom, despite rumours to the contrary. Jesus said, "*I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life ...*"

"Do unto others..." is a good rule of thumb. I live by that. Forgiveness is probably the greatest virtue there is. But that's exactly what it is -- a virtue. Not just a Christian virtue. No one owns being good. I'm good. I just don't believe I'll be rewarded for it in heaven. My reward is here and now. It's knowing that I try to do the right thing. That I lived a good life. And that's where spirituality really lost its way. When it became

a stick to beat people with. "Do this or you'll burn in hell." You won't burn in hell. But be nice anyway."

Who says you live a good life? What standards other than self-administered ones have led to judging your own behaviour? This is not a personal criticism, it's the basic problem with man (and woman). We love to justify ourselves. But then Christians could do better in the way they can come across as selfish, cold and judgemental. You are so right on that one, there must be better ways to get our points across.

So, perhaps we have learned a little more about real people outside our own "bubble". It's as important for us to understand *what makes them tick* as it is for us to communicate to them *how God ticks*.

Back to our apologists. One thing comes to mind and ... that's what it comes to ... the *mind*. That's the area of engagement, *the mind*. If you had been in the audience for the "Does God exist?" tour, it would have been argument and counter-argument that you witness. And you wouldn't have expected the following exchange:

God exists. No he doesn't. Yes He does. No he doesn't. Yes He does ...

Instead, expect the argument from ignorance, the argument from popularity, the transcendental popularity, the argument from coercion, the first cause argument, the argument from authority, the argument from personal experience, the argument

from improbability, the argument from design and Pascal's wager. Of course, the atheists would have counters to the above, as well as their own set of arguments. The result of this is, as mentioned earlier, a joust with words, ideas, arguments.

Is there something missing here? There is, if the intention is *just* to change people's minds. With the Gospel it's different, it's *hearts and minds.* And one without the other won't do. Apologists have all the best arguments of course, so it's no surprise when we see them winning minds. That particular battle is a *Greek* one, in the realm of the intellect, of reason or debate. You may win minds this way, but you will *never win hearts;* that's a very different kettle of fish, a *Hebraic* one. Remember Ricky Gervais's first comment?

"I don't believe in God because there is absolutely no scientific evidence for his existence and from what I've heard the very definition is a logical impossibility in this known universe."

God is not found by scientific evidence. The Bible tells us how God is found:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all

your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 4:29)

With all your heart and all your soul. That's the way to do it. Your mind is involved in the seeking and, certainly, the work of the apologist is part of the process, but you are only going to connect to God when you *really want to.*

The Greek mind says that we should strive for knowledge *about* God (using our mind only); the Hebraic mind says that we should *know God* (with our heart and mind). Apologetics will get you to stage one, knowing *about* God, but to know God is to search for Him diligently. And He won't let you down.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

Apologetics won't give you *faith.* They can feed a faith that is already there, but faith is a decision that you are going to have to make alone, it's a personal thing, you and God. But, of course, you know that already.

You can't be a *Greek* Christian, one who has been convinced in mind only. That was me, for ten years, ten *wasted* years (though God had a plan!) when I accepted the things of God as true but did not have sufficient faith to allow the Holy Spirit into my heart. Be warned:

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe

that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Only with faith can we become Christians, in mind, heart and soul. You can't *think* your way into the kingdom, but your mind can show you where it can be found. That's the value of apologetics.

If you have friends who are earnestly seeking God, pray for them, not just that they can be convinced by argument but that they may be given the gift of faith to meld that argument into their soul and spirit.

Last words

If there's one thing that you can take from this small book, it is this: there is always more than meets the eye, for those with ears to hear and a mind that desires to seek the truth at all times.

Hopefully you have been educated, inspired, even provoked by what you have read here. You may be at the end of this book, but you could be at the very start of an exciting journey into the Heart and Mind of God.

Perhaps this has made you hungry for more? In which case, you can grasp your future in both hands. In one hand the Bible of your choice and, in the other, my new book *The Bishop's New Clothes*, which expands on the ideas you have read here, available in print and on Kindle from September 24th 2013. Although I would of course always recommend The Bible in the first instance, my book will at least give you some insights as to how we approach God's words.

If this book has *really* motivated you and you want to meet others who are ready to embark on a fresh journey of discovery, or who are already travelling, then you may want to consider our Foundations conferences. The fourth one is on September 23-27th 2013 and you can find out more at www.foundationsconferences.com.

If you're not sure about these things ... well, you can always ask the One Who created you.

Why not visit Steve's publisher's website at www.sppublishing.com

Steve's ministry website is www.kesherweb.com

You can contact Steve at steve@saltshakers.com